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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

Research Memorandum
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TO : The Secretary
THROUGH: S/S
FROM : LT Roger Hilsman
SUBJECT: Peiping and The Cuban Crisis: October 22-31

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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DEPUTY UNDER
SECRETARY OF STATE

This report has been prepared to point up the increasingly sharp divergence between Moscow and Peiping's analysis of the Cuban crisis and to suggest some implications of the crisis for Sino-Soviet relations and Peiping policy.

ABSTRACT

As the Cuban crisis developed and Peiping increasingly discerned Moscow's reluctance to accept a military confrontation with the United States over the missile bases in Cuba, initially cautious Chinese comment on the crisis has steadily become less restrained. Peiping has also obviously attempted to identify itself more closely with Castro and Cuba -- calling themselves Cuba's "most reliable comrade-in-arms" -- and to disassociate itself from Soviet policy. Since October 28 its commentaries have grown steadily more critical of the Soviet position culminating in a bitter editorial October 31 implicitly rejecting the US-Soviet agreements and supporting Castro's conditions which Moscow has not backed. The crisis cannot help but exacerbate Sino-Soviet relations and will be used by Peiping to condemn Soviet lack of will in dealing with the West, and Moscow's inclination to sacrifice the interests of other "socialist states."

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Initial Reaction

The preliminary Chinese response to the President's October 22 speech was cautious. The speech itself was not mentioned by Chinese news media until 17 hours after it was made. Initial coverage did, however, for the first and only time in Peiping's handling of the crisis so far, specifically mention the President's warning of a military strike against the USSR and quoted the President on the existence of Soviet offensive missile sites in Cuba and their nuclear strike capability against the US.

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The first Peiping commentary came in a People's Daily editorial October 24 which charged that the US accusation about the presence of "offensive equipment" in Cuba was merely a pretext to justify a US invasion of the island. It expressed "no doubt" that the Cuban struggle "will enjoy resolute support from the entire socialist camp," and that the Cuban people, "backed up by all peace-loving countries and peoples of the whole world," would be able to defeat US aggression and intervention. Although in subsequent Peiping commentaries and speeches, references were made both to the inevitable victory of the "Cuban people" and to support by the socialist camp and all "peace-loving peoples" for Cuba, this was the only place in which the Chinese Communists directly linked these two themes together. Presumably this reflected Peiping's assumption at this point that the Soviets would take a harder line on Cuba. Nevertheless, even in this editorial, the dominant note is one of the Cubans resisting US aggression through their own efforts rather than of massive bloc defiance.

Although there were subsequent shifts in other important aspects of the Chinese Communist attitude toward the crisis, three key elements in this first editorial remained constant: (1) the crisis fundamentally related to US-Cuban relations and the Caribbean area although it symbolized the type of "US imperialist aggressiveness" of which Peiping has been the Cassandra for years; (2) the Cubans must depend primarily upon their own efforts to resist US threats; and (3) the possibility of world war arising out of the crisis was given scant attention.

Early on October 25, Peiping released its own Government statement which, in passing, supported the Soviet statement issued two days earlier and described the statement as declaring that the Soviet Union "will do its best to smash US schemes and defend peace." The CPR statement called for "all possible steps to support and help the Cuban people" but devoted most of its space to emphasizing that the Cubans would be able to defend themselves against the US "plots." Editorials the same day in the Peiping press echoed these themes and avowed that the Chinese "stand firm" by Cuba's side.

A small but significant shift appeared in the tone of certain of Peiping's comments on the crisis October 25. Khrushchev's October 24 letter to Lord Russell was obviously available to the Peiping leaders that day and, in fact, was reported over Peiping radio early on October 26. This letter almost certainly signified to the Chinese (if they were not told directly by the Russians) that Moscow was searching for a negotiated solution to the crisis and desperately hoped to avoid a military conflict with the US over Cuba. At this point, Peiping's comments began increasingly to stress the reliability of Chinese friendship and devotion to Cuba and to hint darkly at the desirability of a stiffer bloc line. Army Chief-of-Staff Lo Ju-ch'ing, addressing a North Korean reception that evening, stressed that there had been a change in the balance of forces in the world since the Korean War and that if the US attacks Cuba, it will "meet with a more serious defeat" than ten years earlier. The socialist camp was behind Cuba, said Lo, and the Chinese were the Cubans' "most reliable comrade-in-arms."

The next day, October 26, substantial Peiping publicity was given to long extracts from a speech by Soviet Defense Minister Malinovsky warning the West of Soviet military strength and preparedness. Possibly the Chinese may have envisaged that the reprinting of the Malinovsky speech (actually given on October 23) in Pravda the previous day represented a new hardening of the Soviet line. Or it could have merely constituted an example of the case Peiping was preparing to build contrasting Soviet words with their deeds. There was no further Peiping editorial or speech comment on the crisis either October 26 or 27, although the press continued to carry reports of Cuban defense preparations and of international reaction critical to the US actions. On October 27, however, Peiping reported Khrushchev's letter to UN Secretary General U Thant accepting his proposal that Soviet ships be kept away from the blockade interception areas, probably an unmistakeable indication to Peiping that the Soviet position would not harden.

Second Stage Reaction

The Chinese launched their first real propaganda effort on the crisis on October 28 after the Soviet response to the US moves had become completely clear. The effort was plainly designed for its impact abroad, however, rather than to stir up any domestic feelings. A western correspondent in Peiping reported there were no parades, no banners or posters, and little enthusiasm over the issue in the city. Although rallies were held in Peiping and other mainland cities on October 28 and 29, most were apparently on a relatively small scale.

A host of regime leaders turned out, however, for the main Peiping meeting, a sure indication that the political importance of the message to be conveyed by the rally was high. Politburo members Chou En-lai, Ch'en I, Ho Lung, Teng Hsiao-p'ing, and P'eng Chen were present along with Chief-of-Staff Lo Jui-ch'ing. Delivering the main rally speech, P'eng Chen vigorously argued that the Cuban developments demonstrated the need for the Cubans (and others threatened by US imperialism) to rely primarily on their own struggles and efforts. Apparently directing his criticism at the Soviet decision to withdraw its missiles from Cuba (announced later the same day over Peiping Radio), P'eng Chen scoffed at the "much-vaunted weapons of imperialists and reactionaries" as less important or decisive in determining victory than the efforts of the "masses." He linked China and Cuba together as "both" being "socialist countries" (terminology not previously used by Peiping), and said the "correct foreign policies" of the two states were supported by peace-loving people throughout the world. P'eng expanded Lo Jui-ch'ing's statement three days earlier, calling the Chinese the "most faithful and reliable comrades-in-arms of the Cubans" and asserting that Peiping would try "by all possible means" to support the Cuban's struggle.

* Moscow has never formally described Cuba as a "socialist country."

P'eng's message to the Cubans (and the rest of the communist movement) appeared to be that Peiping's heart and will were firm (unlike the Soviets') but its resources were unfortunately not equal to its intentions in this critical situation. Raising Peiping's evaluation of bloc -- and therefore Soviet -- responsibilities in the crisis to a new level (now that the Soviet decision had become clear), P'eng Chen asserted that support for the Cuban struggle was an "unshirkable international obligation of the people of the socialist camp." He specifically challenged the Soviets to break the US blockade (while not actually naming the USSR) by warning that if the US naval actions went untested in the Caribbean, new US threats would soon arise elsewhere in the world.

On October 29, Peiping continued to give primary attention to Cuban defiance of the US. Castro's conditions for the withdrawal of Soviet missiles were prominently featured in the regime press as was Raul Castro's speech expressing distrust of US promises not to invade Cuba. For Peiping's audience, the crisis continued and centered about US intentions to invade the island. The Chinese contrasted Raul Castro's disbelief of US intentions with Khrushchev's belief by broadcasting a venomously one-sided summary of Khrushchev's letter to the President of October 28. The summary selected -- without additional comment -- every Khrushchev reference to "trust," "respect," and "confidence" in the President and to the need for caution, sobriety, wisdom, and avoidance of irritation and provocation by both sides. The same day, a French correspondent in Peiping reported "usually reliable sources" as saying official Chinese circles were describing Soviet behavior in the Cuban crisis as a "Soviet Munich." Whether this characterization was actually made or not, it seemed to sum up neatly the tone of P'eng Chen's speech the preceding day.

A Peiping Ta Kung Pao editorial October 29 sharpened a statement in the P'eng speech by observing: "It is a sacred international obligation of the Chinese to extend every possible aid and support to the Cubans." At the same time, Peiping gave greater press coverage to the rejected Soviet offer of October 27 to exchange a US withdrawal of its missiles from Turkey for Soviet missile pullback from Cuba than to the accepted Khrushchev offer of October 28, although the latter was briefly summarized in an inconspicuous corner of the People's Daily October 29.

On October 30, a Peiping newspaper editorial pointedly ignored the US-Soviet accord and again took the opportunity to stress that the Chinese would back the Cubans "in every way." The explicit rebuke was made more obvious by the publication in the same issue of full texts of the President's and Khrushchev's messages of October 28, in addition to a reference to a pledge by "international brigade volunteers" to defend Cuba.

Peiping's first official comment on the Khrushchev-Kennedy agreement appeared in a blistering People's Daily editorial on October 31 implicitly rejecting the accord completely. In its only explicit reference to the Soviet

position, the editorial introduced its arguments by noting without approval that, "after" Khrushchev had agreed to withdraw the offensive weapons, President Kennedy had agreed to remove the blockade and to give assurances against an invasion of Cuba. To make its position clear, the editorial strongly endorsed Castro's conditions for any missile withdrawal, describing the demands as "fully justified and absolutely necessary." The Cubans were justified, it asserted in a direct slap at the Soviets, "in refusing all unreasonable claims infringing upon Cuban sovereignty." The editorial in effect rejected Khrushchev's acceptance of US assurances on Cuba by calling these "empty" and "nothing but a hoax," and heavily emphasized that the danger of US invasion of Cuba remains as high as before. The editorial quoted Western sources as hailing the crisis as a "major (US) triumph," and totally ignored Soviet and Eastern European characterization of the result as a tribute to Soviet concern for world peace and Cuban independence, thus scorning the Soviet claims completely.

In common with other Peiping commentaries after October 25, the editorial lavishly praised Castro and Cuba. Cuban determination would be firm, it said, even if the US "threatens to launch a nuclear war," Peiping's first specific reference to this subject. The editorial took another hard slap at the Soviets by praising the Cubans for having "demonstrated a revolutionary spirit of never submitting to the aggressor and strong pressure," and thus for having "defended the honor of being a socialist country."

Finally, the editorial reiterated Chinese admiration for the Cubans and stressed that "we ... will forever stand by the Cuban people and struggle with them to the end." It dropped the phrase which had appeared in most of the earlier Peiping commentaries that "the socialist countries" supported Cuba and inserted a new phrase, "the revolutionary people," in its place, thus appearing to reject the current position of the Soviets and most of the Eastern European bloc states as being any "support" for Cuba whatsoever.

An editorial in the November 1 issue of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee's organ, Red Flag (broadcast October 31) repeated the key themes of the People's Daily editorial. It categorically called Cuba the "first socialist state in Latin America" and reviewed the history of the Cuban revolution in such a way as to make it appear almost a carbon copy of Chinese Communist revolutionary history. For the first time, however, the Red Flag editorial explicitly linked the issue of Marxist-Leninist principle with the Cuban crisis in asking, "On what strength do the oppressed nations and oppressed peoples depend for their liberation and on what strength do they safeguard the fruits of their revolution? ... For Marxist-Leninists, the answer has always been that (they) will depend only on their own strength to liberate themselves." "Imperialism and all reactionaries are, in the final analysis, paper tigers," the editorial concludes, quoting Mao's famous slogan which the Soviets have consistently rejected. In the sharpest barb thrust at the Soviets, the editorial warns, "Only by having unshakable faith in the great strength of the people and by relying on the people's revolutionary struggle can one avoid being cowed by the US imperialist military pressure or being deceived by its flowery words." (All

emphasis added.) Only in shifting back to a reference to the support of the "socialist camp" for the Cubans does the editorial diverge from the tone of the People's Daily editorial of October 30.

Peiping Evaluation of Significance of Crisis

The latest Peiping commentaries leave absolutely no doubt that Peiping is bitterly critical of the Soviet handling of the Cuban crisis and that they intend to use it as another handle with which to attack Soviet policy and leadership within the international communist movement.

Peiping was probably aware of the danger of war in the crisis and would have been reluctant to have a nuclear conflict precipitated over Cuba. For its part, Peiping has at no point attempted to link any potential Far Eastern crisis areas with Cuba or to threaten any direct action of its own. Nor, aside from the reference to "international brigade volunteers" on October 30 has there been any hint of "Chinese volunteers." The Chinese, however, probably believe the Soviets had other alternatives open to them than a complete withdrawal of the missile bases in Cuba and, at the very least, should have been able to obtain more tangible US concessions than what they now describe as a worthless commitment not to invade Cuba.

Peiping was almost certainly not consulted by Moscow during the crisis and, while it probably did not expect such consultation, this will provide the Chinese with another ground for criticism of the Soviets while completely freeing their hands, relieving them of any sense of responsibility for the Soviet decisions. Peiping may not even have known of the existence of the Soviet missile bases in Cuba and may resent not only Soviet failure to communicate this information, but Soviet willingness to station missiles in Cuba while denying them to the Chinese. At the same time, Peiping will probably feel itself vindicated in refusing in the past to accept Soviet bases and missiles in China under Soviet control, observing from the Cuban example the lack of dependability of the Soviets under pressure. A corollary consequence will probably be to degrade even further for Peiping the reliability of Soviet defense commitments to the Chinese, although it will recognize that the formal Soviet assurances to the CPR are not identical with those undertaken by Moscow toward Cuba.

The Chinese may not raise many or even any of these issues specifically in public statements, but they will probably be voiced by implication in their polemics against Moscow. It is extremely probable, however, that they will provide rich ammunition for the Chinese to use against Moscow in private contacts and communications within the international communist movement and among select members of the Afro-Asian community. The crisis cannot, therefore, help but aggravate Sino-Soviet tensions and the rift within the entire international communist movement.